The Translation of a Hero

AUTHOR(S):

Hale, David

CITATION:

Hale, David. The Translation of a Hero. 英文学評論 1977, 37: [1]-35

ISSUE DATE:

1977-03

URL:

https://doi.org/10.14989/RevEL_37_(1)

The Translation of a Hero

David Hale

It is, I am afraid, not my concern in this paper to try and deal with the question of whether the hero is finally dead or not, nor really even to discuss concepts of the heroic *per se*. James Joyce's vision of his characters' exploits in 'Ulysses' is therefore outside my range. But it is the figure of Ulysses that I wish to deal with, and some aspects of his character in an Italian original may prove touchstones with which other versions of the same figure can be compared. You might remember that Ransom, the apparent hero of 'The Ascent of F6' by Auden and Isherwood, opens that play with a dramatic monologue challenging earlier ideas of the heroic, by quoting a passage from Dante, or rather, by reading from the literal translation of the Temple Classics edition. This is a speech which Ulysses makes to encourage his old companions to undertake the last and most daring voyage of their lives, beyond the pillars of Hercules to the edge of the earth. 'Ransom (reads): 'O brothers!' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand dangers have reached the West, deny not, to this brief vigil of your senses that remains, experience of the unpeopled world behind the Sun. Consider your origin: ye were not formed to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.'' (*The Ascent of F6*, Auden & Isherwood, Act 1, Sc. i, 8th impression, Nov. 1969, p. 13.) Ransom

then makes the following observations: ''Virtue and knowledge! One can picture Ulysses' audience: a crook speaking to crooks. Seedy adventurers, of whose expensive education nothing remained but a few grammatical tags and certain gestures of the head; refugees from the consequences of vice or eccentric and conceited opinions; natural murderers whom a peaceful winter had reduced to palsied wrecks; the ugly and cowardly who foresaw in a virgin land an era of unlimited and effortless indulgence; teachers without pupils, tormentors without victims, parasites without hosts, lunatic missionaries, orphans.'' Ransom next extends his diatribe from Ulysses to the poet himself: ''Who was Dante—to whom the Universe was peopled only by his aristocratic Italian acquaintances and a few classical literary characters, the fruit of an exile's reading—who was Dante, to speak of Virtue and Knowledge?...We have heard these words before; and we shall hear them again—during the nursery luncheon, on the prize-giving afternoon, in the quack advertisement, at the conference of generals or industrial captains: justifying every baseness and excusing every failure, comforting the stilted schoolboy lives, charming the wax-like and baroque, inflaming the obstinate and the odd.....'' (op. cit., pp. 13–14.)

So Ransom continues, and the play gives us insights into a number of different kinds of 'hero', none of whom is finally worth the respect of anyone who is allowed to see below the surface of their characters and motives.

But Ransom's Ulysses sounds like a cross between an English public-school failure and a frustrated don, and he seems to be mistakenly heading for the land of the lotos-eaters or a breakdown in an atmosphere

of post-Marxian capitalistic collapse.

Ransom may be at least to some extent the victim of the myth he helps to dismember. I want to take a look at Dante's seeker after 'Virtue and Knowledge' as he is presented to us, not in the clumsy transliteration of the Temple Classics edition (which might be responsible for some of Ransom's errors here) but first in the original Italian of the XXVIth Canto of the *Inferno*. This episode is a product of Dante's imagination, created without suggestion from classical literatures, and it is very suitable for my purpose because it is self-contained, and although its context is obviously important it can be temporarily detached.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that the early 14th Century Church had definite opinions about pagans in accordance with which Dante has placed his Ulysses in Hell, deep in the VIIIth circle among the Evil Counsellors because of the disastrous results of his bad advice. This setting is, of course, important in ultimately deciding how Dante really viewed this figure, but my concern will be mainly to see how, within the episode itself, Dante creates the *character* of Ulysses. We are dealing with a medieval Italian view of ancient Greece, and there is an enormous gulf in intellectual and spiritual terms even if both cultures belong loosely to what we mean by the phrase 'the European consciousness'. In looking back from Ransom's day to Dante's there is similarly a tremendous gap. These differences create some of the obstacles for the translator. From a brief survey of a selected number of translations we might see how the original picture has been recreated and make some observations on the prin-

ciples of translation involved.

Naturally my initial reading of Dante's figure is crucial, and, as a non-native user of Italian, I must base my remarks on guidelines set down by some Italian critics, though there seems to be considerable latitude among them. Nevertheless they agree that the figure of Ulysses painted by Dante is a figure that commands respect. V. Rossi writes that this episode is 'a brief, condensed, epic story, defining (Ulysses') character with amazing power and exalting it at the same time to be a symbol of sublime humanity, making of it one of those great and rare creations in which the particular shines with so clear a light that it assumes a universal significance.' The somewhat more restrained but nevertheless high praise accorded Ulysses by B. Croce, the critic who set alight Dante studies afresh for modern times, is in basically similar terms: 'No one of his age was more deeply moved than Dante by the passion to know all that is knowable, and nowhere else has he given such noble expression to that noble passion as in the great figure of Ulysses.' (Both views quoted from John D. Sinclair's translation of *The Divine Comedy,* Note, pp. 330–331, Bodley Head, 4th impression, 1964.)

Croce raises a difficult question. He suggests that Dante in some sense approves of Ulysses, that this figure seems almost to be a definition of the noble or the heroic, even though he is damned in hell. Croce's thesis was, of course, that Dante was altogether sympathetic towards Ulysses, but was in no position to openly contradict the doctrinal views of the Church of his day. He paid lip-service to them by placing Ulysses among the evil counsellors, but his interest can be detected

in the *poetry* that Ulysses' plight provoked. It is, I hope, just outside the range of this paper to make any sort of pronouncement on this question, but I would like to avail myself of Croce's highly sensitive ear, and the ears of many critics who before and after him have responded to something special in the language of the poem here, and in other episodes which raise the same problem, noticeably the Paolo and Francesca episode in the Vth Canto. Though the sensitivity to the Italian is a rather subjective basis on which to build an interpretation, we must agree that Dante has achieved heights of poetry perhaps detectable in these episodes even to the ear of non-native users of Italian, and that few such claims have been made for many passages in the *Paradiso*.

In my reading of Dante's original I am more concerned to find the 'substance', for lack of a better word, than to quibble over the individual rendering of each and every expression. There are, therefore, several parts of the original which we must look at in careful detail in order to try and determine just what that 'substance' is.

To Dante-the-pilgrim Virgil explains that he had himself better address the approaching figure of Ulysses because if Ulysses is spoken to in Italian he might disdain to answer. Despite annotators' comments the meaning of this point has not been fully clarified, but nevertheless in this way Dante-the-author adds a sense of remoteness to his Ulysses before he even speaks. This is emphasised by the rather humble approach Virgil makes to the flame. He begs Ulysses to tell them about his last voyage, and he says that his request is not based on any reputation he may have earned from his own famous poem or any reflection

that may have had on the reputations of the ancient heroes themselves. Though this is obviously something of a rhetorical device by which he can mention who he is without stating that his own prestige deserves an answer, there is something subdued about the request. The fact that Dante makes Virgil so circumspect adds something to the dramatic credibility of the scene. It is also interesting to note that Virgil and Dante-the-pilgrim do not think of engaging Ulysses in the kind of cross-examination to which they subject many of the other spirits encountered. He is merely requested to tell them his tale. The remoteness implies a natural dignity, assumes a respect. The evocative poetry and the magnificent sound of the lines which describe Ulysses in the flame, trembling as it prepares to speak, add to this impression:

Lo maggior corno della fiamma antica
cominciò a crollarsi mormorando,
pur come quella cui vento affatica.
Indi la cima qua e là menando,
come fosse la lingua che parlasse,
gittò voce di fuori e disse... (11. 85 – 90.)

The greater horn of the ancient flame began to shake itself, murmuring, just like a flame that struggles with the wind.

Then carrying to and fro the top, as if it were the tongue that spake, threw forth a voice, and said...

(Temple Classics translation, repr. 1958, p. 293. Italian quoted from this edition throughout.)

The impressive manner in which Ulysses is introduced may be one useful touchstone, and in listening to what Ulysses says, and to how he says it, we might pin-point two more. It is important to see how Ulysses *looks at himself,* and how he *looks at his colleagues* who are to share with him this last voyage.

In talking of his decision to go he makes no implication, let alone statement, of special virtues in himself. On the contrary he lists a number of serious family responsibilities and obligations that ought to keep him at home. He mentions his fondness for his son, states his reverence for an aged father, and admits the 'due' love which he owes Penelope. He seems fully sensitive to the nature of these claims, and is not listing them out of a kind of bravado that can boast about what it is prepared to sacrifice. The straightforward language in which these ties are depicted might even suggest that he felt them strongly. But something else is stronger and, unlike the desperadoes in Ransom's account, this Ulysses sounds quite genuine when he talks of the force that compels him. It is not desire for fame, there is every reason to suppose that they will never be heard of again, nor for the mere excitement of travel. Dante's Italian is evocative but precise here:
(none of these obligations)

'vincer poter dentro da me l'ardore
ch' i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
e degli vizii umani e del valore;'
(11. 97 – 99)

'could conquer in me the ardour that I had to gain

experience of the world, and of human vice and worth.'
(TC edn., p. 293.)

A paraphrase might amplify what the Italian states here. Ulysses wants to become familiar with all that the world has to offer, to come to know as much as possible of the depths of which human beings are capable, and also of the heights of courage they can show. I doubt if he is thinking of his own or his companions' actions.

He sounds like a man who has few illusions but who wishes to make the most of the last of his time, to continue to plunge into living. Far from a drum-beating expedition his band seems pathetically small. There is just himself and one ship containing those of his companions who have not yet deserted him. We have even perhaps a touch of irony in the way he talks of them and himself: 'I and my companions were old and tardy.' (TC trans., line 106.) When they come to the pillars of Hercules, Ulysses makes the small speech to them that we heard from Ransom's rather cynical lips. It is a very brief speech, simply spoken.

' 'O frati,' dissi, 'che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti all' occidente,
a questa tanto picciola vigilia
de' vostri sensi, ch' è del rimanente,
non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente.
Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,

ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.' (11. 112 - 120.)

We have seen the rather trivial Temple Classics rendering of this passage, and I would like to just point out in a paraphrase something of the 'substance' of this speech. Ulysses calls his men 'Brothers' because they have shared with him 'a hundred thousand dangers.' They have now come to the western edge of the globe, and he encourages them not to deprive themselves of the chance to use up the last drop of their lives in voyaging to see what may lie in that unknown space beyond where the sun sets. He asks them to remember who they are (the appeal to *semenza* is surely not an appeal to class but to the fact that they are *men*) and to recognise the difference between themselves and the lower forms of life, the 'bruti'. They were given different talents and should make use of them, following the road towards 'virtute e conoscenza'. This phrase calls for Ransom's ridicule, but we must realise that it needs very careful translation. We are hardly to suppose that Dante made his Ulysses set off on the path towards the Christian 'virtues', and 'knowledge' was fighting a terrible battle with the dogma of the Catholic Church in medieval times. Perhaps the word 'virtute' is much closer to 'courage' in its widest sense than to any doctrinal code. In Ulysses' mouth it may smack more of its Latin origin in 'vir' meaning 'man', though what seems to be 'manly' in one culture or language may be interpreted quite differently in another.

At any rate, his 'orazion picciola', his 'short speech', had an immediate reaction. Ulysses' companions obviously needed little persuasion, they responded to the nature of the appeal instinctively, and the terms it was

couched in.

'Li miei compagni fec' io sì acuti,
con questa orazion picciola, al cammino,
che appena poscia gli avrei ritenuti.' (11. 121 – 123.)

'With this brief speech I made my companions so eager for the voyage, that I could hardly then have checked them.' (TC edn., p. 295.)

It is worth emphasising that he refers to his own speech as an 'orazion picciola', a 'very short speech', in almost self-deprecating terms. Again nothing is said, or perhaps even implied, of their own courage if they follow his instructions. There is instead a kind of irony as Ulysses looks back on the actions that led to their fate:

'e, volta nostra poppa nel mattino,
de' remi facemmo ale al folle volo...' (11. 124 – 5.)

The awkwardness of the Temple Classics version conceals the direct simplicity of the original here:

'and, turning the poop towards morning, we of our oars made wings for the foolish flight...' (TC edn., p. 295.)

The bow was turned towards the unknown of the western ocean, and the crew rowed so strongly that their oars seemed to be like wings for their 'foolish' voyage.

For my purpose the further details of the voyage are not really very important, though in showing how the stars come to be seen from an

hitherto unimaginable angle Dante creates a sense of the scale of the adventure, as the moon rises and sets on the small band of explorers five times. Ulysses and his companions are allowed a glimpse of an incredibly high mountain—Purgatory, in fact—before the ship is sunk in a fierce tempest and they are drowned 'com' altrui piacque', 'as pleased Another.' There seems to be nothing stilted about the direct and simple language Dante uses to draw the shipwreck and with the sound of the sea closing above the drowning men, Ulysses' voice falls silent.

Perhaps Ulysses' tale, recounted from the depth of hell, gains in dramatic intensity because the narrator himself is being consumed in the fire of his own punishment, but what seems to characterise it as an episode embodying an idea of the heroic must surely be its *understatement.* Even in hell Ulysses seems no more concerned with his reputation than he was when he set out.

One of the obvious problems of the translation of verse is the question of whether to translate into prose or verse, and if verse, whether to attempt to use the original metrical structure or select some other. Dante's *terza rima* presents the additional problem that it requires a complex and supple rhyming pattern which, if rendered into English, puts a great strain on the resources of the language. In the original, at least as far as we can see, the demands of the rhyme practically never distort the rhythmical flow or affect the expression of the idea. It may be that linguistic studies will show that there are rhythmical structures basically suitable to particular languages, though I would hesitate to suggest that what *terza rima* is to Italian, blank verse must be to English.

Nevertheless the question is important since we are expecting the translator to achieve a *tone* equivalent to, or at least not wildly different from, that of the original. Warwick Chipman in the Translator's Note to his edition of *The Divine Comedy* (OUP, 1961) attempts a definition of what Dante's style is like:

'Dante's style is unique. He knew it, and called it *lo bello stilo*. Its chief notes seem to be purity, gravity, and nobility. It is almost puritanical in its simplicity, and yet is magnificent in phrase and cadence. It is weighty, yet swift...(The) rhythm (of the lines) is so powerful that they sweep everything before them in a marvellous continuity and flow. All this is disciplined by his subtle *terza rima*, never failing the ear, but never too insistent; linking everything together, but never breaking the movement.' (pp. vii - viii.)

Naturally every translator realises that it is beyond his skill to transmit the *poetry* of any original, at least if he is sufficiently modest, but the relation of the style chosen in the language into which the poem is to be rendered, to the substance of the original seems to me to be particularly important if any of the same sort of tone is to be transmitted. The level of the translation must also be *consistent* throughout, or lapses in style may detract from the convincingness of the total picture.

Perhaps the most common access to Dante's poem in English for the last quarter of a century must have been through the Penguin Classics translation of Dorothy L. Sayers. This was first published (unfinished at Miss Sayers' death) in 1949, and it has been reissued every year since then. It would, of course, be very foolish to make sweeping statements about the general competence or desirability of that

translation from a cursory examination of a few lines from one Canto of one Book. Yet in these few lines we can at least see whether she has managed to convey something of the substance of the original in this particular case.

Sayers has chosen to use *terza rima,* and her translation is literal in the sense that it follows the syntax of the original quite closely, altering it only to meet the demands of acceptable English structures. She faithfully renders every phrase of the original here, and nowhere adds anything to it, even to clarify or explain obscure points.

Sayers' Virgil tells Dante-the-pilgrim to allow him to do the talking lest 'they, being Greek, / Haply might scorn thy speech and pay no heed.' (11. 74 - 5.) Apart from the archaic 'haply', which is not unsuitable to Virgil here, we have a modern English retaining the necessary and important distinction between 'you' and 'thee', and the kind of lofty remoteness that distinguishes the original. Something of that impressive, distant dignity is also maintained in the following lines describing the flame as it prepares to speak:

> Then of that age-old fire the loftier horn
> Began to mutter and move, as a wavering flame
> Wrestles against the wind and is over-worn;
> And, like a speaking tongue vibrant to frame
> Language, the tip of it flickering to and fro
> Threw out a voice... (11. 85 – 90.)

The rhythm of the translation carries us successfully past a number of rather 'literary' usages including 'loftier' and 'over-worn' and the

expression 'vibrant to frame / Language' which is not quite as meaningful as it should be. Nevertheless the dignity is still sustained in the matter-of-fact presentation of the ties of love and duty to which Ulysses should have listened:

'No tenderness for my son, nor piety
To my old father, nor the wedded love
That should have comforted Penelope...' (11. 94 – 96.)

But there seems to me to be a serious lapse in the dignity when the translation follows like this:

(none of these things)
'Could conquer in me the restless itch to rove
And rummage through the world exploring it,
All human worth and wickedness to prove.' (11. 97 – 99.)

Ulysses' burning desire to find out the heights and depths of what people are capable of has been reduced to a scale of things quite different. 'An *itch* to rove and *rummage*' sounds more like sorting through the boxes in one's attic, and the meditative implication of the word 'prove' gives a feeling of detachment to a figure that ought to have been totally involved. This Ulysses might be too much the judge of the affairs of men and too little the participator in them.

The same uneven or literary language and the lapses in tone can be seen in the speech which he makes to encourage his men on their last voyage:

' 'Brothers,' said I, 'that have come valiantly

Through hundred thousand jeopardies undergone
To reach the West, you will not now deny
To this last little vigil left to run
Of feeling life, the new experience
Of the uninhabited world behind the sun.
Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance
Your mettle was not made, you were made men,
To follow after knowledge and excellence.'' (11. 112 – 120.)

'Jeopardies' seem too literary to be real, and the word 'undergone' is superfluous. The excellent touch of 'this last little vigil left to run/ Of feeling life' is spoiled by the exhortation 'Think of your breed' which sounds much more like an appeal to the sympathies of a dog-lover than to a sense of being a human. Sayers has translated 'virtute' as 'excellence' which at least avoids specifically Christian interference. But the total translation seems trite when we read:

'My little speech made every one so keen
To forge ahead, that even if I'd tried
I hardly think I could have held them in.' (11. 121 – 123.)

This smacks of a school-girl enthusiasm in the expression 'forge ahead', and, with the jingling rhythm, is quite out-of-place in this context. The sinking of the ship is rendered with a disastrous rhyme-scheme that turns it into a literary travesty:

'.....but soon we had to weep,
For out of the unknown land there blew foul weather,

And a whirlwind struck the forepart of the ship;
And three times round she went in a roaring smother
With all the waters; at the fourth, the poop
Rose, and the prow went down, as pleased Another,

And over our heads the hollow seas closed up.'
(11. 136 – 142.)

I think I have shown sufficient of this translation to suggest that the figure of Ulysses here is forced to seem trivial. This seems to be at least partly a result of the metrical requirement of the *terza rima*, or its rhyming needs, and is coupled with a literary concept of the level of rhetoric in the original, and the false assumption that a character impressive in the same way that Dante's Ulysses is impressive can be stitched up from a rag-bag of phrases and expressions quite different from each other in tone and pitch. We are clearly much further from Chipman's ideal picture of Dante's style than we need be.

It might be supposed that a prose translation would automatically avoid many of these pitfalls, and the translator certainly has a freedom in choice and arrangement of his language which is not allowed him if he must use a rigid metrical form. I propose to take just a brief look at one fairly recent such translation. Sinclair's version was published, as I mentioned, in 1936, and the 4th edition is dated 1964. The Preface tells us that, however far he may fall short of it, the translator's aim is 'of combining a close rendering of the Italian with the requirements of a credible English.....to serve readers who have little or no knowledge of Italian and who wish to know the matter of Dante's

poem.' (p. 9.)

Sinclair's word 'matter' should perhaps correspond to what I have been calling the 'substance' of the poem in the particular episode at present in question. This translation follows the Italian fairly closely, neither making omissions from nor adding to the original at any point, though Sinclair does rearrange the syntax into readable English.

On the whole this episode starts smoothly. There is little that is strained in the description of the flame:

'The greater horn of the ancient flame began to toss and murmur just as if it were beaten by the wind, then, waving the point to and fro as if it were the tongue that spoke, it flung forth a voice and said...' (p. 325.)

Similarly, Ulysses talks much like the figure in Dante's poem when he outlines the ties of obligation he is rejecting:

''...not fondness for a son, nor duty to an aged father, nor the love I owed Penelope which should have gladdened her, could conquer within me the passion I had to gain experience of the world and of the vices and the worth of men.'' (op. cit.)

His wish to 'gain experience of the world' seems much more in keeping with the motive that compels Dante's Ulysses than that which compels Sayers', and the restrained but dignified tone is sustained when he describes the beginning of their voyage:

''...I put forth on the open deep with but one ship and with that little company which had not deserted me...'' (op. cit.)

There is no flourish here, merely a matter-of-factness, and this characterises the picture he paints of himself and his companions, though

the word 'outlet' seems slightly inappropriate in this context:

' 'I and my companions were old and slow when we came to that narrow outlet where Hercules set up his landmarks so that men should not pass beyond.' ' (op. cit., pp. 325/7.)

However, when this Ulysses comes to make that 'small speech' to encourage his followers past the pillars of Hercules, I feel that the translator fails to maintain the pitch:

' 'O brothers,' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the west, to this so brief vigil of the senses that remains to us choose not to deny experience, in the sun's track, of the unpeopled world. Take thought of the seed from which you spring. You were not born to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.' '
(op. cit., p. 327.)

There seems to be little point in adhering so closely to the Italian that we have the strange expression 'so brief vigil of the senses that remains to us,' and I find the phrase 'in the sun's track' incomprehensible. Since the translator is using prose, why does he not expand his translation at this point to make clear the concept in the Italian? As I understand it, Ulysses is inviting his companions to go and see what lies beyond, in the path of the setting sun, where there may be a land uninhabited by men. In addition we find a rather disappointing appeal to their 'seed', the selection of the word 'brute', when in modern English 'animal' would probably be more appropriate, and the encouragement to 'follow virtue and knowledge,' words which have many of the unpleasantly limited associations that so disturbed Ransom.

In the narration of the sequence of actions in which the ship is sunk

we ought to expect a workmanlike language. We read:

''We were filled with gladness, and soon it turned to lamentation, for from the new land a storm rose and struck the forepart of the ship. Three times it whirled her round with all the waters, the fourth time lifted the poop aloft and plunged the prow below, as One willed, until the sea closed again over us.'' (op. cit.)

There is a world of difference between Dante's economic lines and the clumsiness of this description. Sinclair seems to wish to adhere too closely to the Italian vocabulary, for example using 'with all the waters' though it is practically meaningless in English. Would there be anything wrong in using contemporary nautical terminology, such as 'bow' instead of 'forepart of the ship', 'stern' instead of 'poop'? It might have been more suitable to expand this section slightly to create a credible scene in which a real boat sank and real men were drowned.

While a prose version must obviously be unable to create any of the visual sense of being verse, it seems to me that it could at least aim to be poetry, while attempting to catch the substance of the original, even though it might of course have to settle for a level of poetry below or at least different from that of the original. However, transliterations apart, the majority of translators seem to have chosen one verse form or another, and I would like next to have a look at some lines from the version of Warwick Chipman, whose description of Dante's style I have already referred to. This translation was published by Oxford University Press in 1961, and, in the Translator's Note, we find a statement of Chipman's aim to 'as far as possible, put (Dante's) tone and his style into English poetry so as to convey not only to an

English mind, but also to an English ear, something of the pleasure of the original.....I can only trust that, without losing the sense, I have found something of the sound and the style of Dante.' (p. vii.) We may remember Chipman's account of Dante's style which he says combines nobility with simplicity, 'weight' with speed, and which is characterised by its 'marvellous continuity and flow.'

Chipman has decided that the only way this impossible task can be solved is by using *terza rima* in English, though he seems perfectly aware of the difficulties he is creating for himself in making this choice, especially with regard to the demands for rhyming words, of which Dante seems to have an 'inexhaustible supply at (his) command.' Chipman spells out the very snags on which in my view his version founders. 'This adds enormously to the task of translating Dante into English poetry if one is not *to distort an idiom,* or *torture a rhyme,* or *take refuge in a paraphrase.*' (op. cit., p. viii, my italics.)

To my ears Chipman's version is characterised by an awe-inspiring triviality which is partly created by the jingle of the rhyme scheme and the monotonously regular line-lengths, and partly by a lack of consistency in pitch where vocabulary is concerned.

> The immemorial flame's more towering horn
> Began to shiver muttering as it swung,
> As if by sudden eddies racked and torn.
> Waving its tip as if it were the tongue
> That spake for it, finally from the flame
> A voice upon our waiting ears was flung. (11. 85 – 90.)

The bathos of the presentation of Ulysses is emphasised when the final stress falls in the following lines on the word 'too' :

'Not fondness for my son, nor piety
For my old father, nor love's holiest due
That should have comforted Penelope,
Could ever the passion in my soul subdue
To know the world and equal knowledge reap
Of man, his vices and his virtues too.' (11. 94 – 99.)

The word 'passion' was used in Sinclair's version much more successfully. The choice and placing of the word 'reap' combine with the rhythm of the lines to detract altogether from the seriousness with which we are able to take this character.

There seems little point in following this version through to its ridiculous end. The figure of Ulysses struts and crows, and disappears almost like a comic villain in what seems like a stage shipwreck:

'We cheered, but soon our cheer became a scream,
For on our ship from the new land was hurled
A hurricane, that smote her forward beam.
Three times about and all awash she whirled
And at the fourth, as by Another disposed,
Upswept the poop and down the forepeak swirled,
Till over us the opening seas reclosed.' (11. 136 – 142.)

There is an enormous gap between Chipman's theory of translation and his practise of it. It is astonishing that his sensitivity to the

Italian is not matched by a sensitivity to English.

I might interpose at this juncture a few lines from a poem by W. B. Yeats simply to illustrate what a natural dignity in English can sound like. In 'Sailing To Byzantium' is depicted an old man who is also making a voyage, though of a different kind. Nevertheless, despite his age and imminent death, there is a devastating nobility and simplicity in lines like these:

> 'An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress...'
> ('Sailing To Byzantium', stanza II; from *The Tower*, 1928.)

The World's Classics version of the episode from Dante's poem, despite the fact that it uses *terza rima,* makes a better showing than Chipman's, but rather than pursue at any more length translations that might have difficulty in substantiating a *raison d' être*, perhaps we should look at two earlier and well-known versions, Francis Cary's (the first parts of which appeared in 1805 – 6) and Laurence Binyon's (1929). Chipman had noticed of Cary's translation that '...being in blank verse, (it) could convey the tone, but could not convey the measures or the mode of Dante.' (Translator's Note, p. vii.) I find this statement somewhat confusing. If Cary's blank verse manages to convey the *tone* of the original, has he not managed to find a useful equivalent to Dante's form? Can we sensibly separate 'tone' from 'measure'? Aren't they in fact two sides of the same coin? We may also wonder

what Chipman means by the word 'mode' other than 'form' in its superficial sense of 'metrical structure'. Cary, at any rate, unequivocably uses blank verse, and I believe that for the most part there is a natural dignity about his lines in this episode that stems partly from the place which blank verse has with regard to English.

> Of the old flame forthwith the greater horn
> Began to roll, murmuring, as a fire
> That labours with the wind, then to and fro
> Wagging the top, as a tongue uttering sounds,
> Threw out its voice, and spake... (11. 85 – 89.)

What distinguishes these lines immediately from those quoted from the versions I have referred to so far is the measured *pace* that to me seems suitable to Ulysses' age and nobility. This must be partly ascribable to the rhythm of blank verse. Yet in the way the lines where necessary flow from one to the next we have a sufficient flexibility to prevent this figure from seeming merely grandiloquent. The delicate line between 'dignity' and 'pomposity' appears to be, by and large, kept here.

> 'Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
> Of my old father, nor return of love,
> That should have crown'd Penelope with joy,
> Could overcome in me the zeal I had
> To explore the world, and search the ways of life,
> Man's evil and his virtue. Forth I sail'd
> Into the deep illimitable main,

With but one bark, and the small faithful band
That yet cleaved to me.....' (11. 93 – 101.)

Despite the rather 'poetic' usage of words such as 'main' and 'bark', this figure on the whole speaks with something of the direct simplicity of Dante's figure. Naturally in the century and a half that separates us from this translation we might expect to find a number of changed word usages, and possibly a different concept of the 'noble' or 'dignified'. (Indeed, the Nobel Prize for 1976 went to Herzog!) But what is astonishing about Cary's figure is that it is considerably closer to Dante's Ulysses than the figures in Sayers', Sinclair's or Chipman's versions. This Ulysses, unless I sadly misread him, seems, while of a mature age, fresh and outspoken, unmindful of his own dignity. He refers to much the same poles by which Dante's figure seems to chart his vision of the world. This is Cary's version of Ulysses' appeal to his faithful companions, now 'tardy with age':

''O brothers!' I began, 'who to the west
Through perils without number now have reach'd;
To this the short remaining watch, that yet
Our senses have to wake, refuse not proof
Of the unpeopled world, following the track
Of Phoebus. Call to mind from whence ye sprang:
Ye were not form'd to live the lives of brutes,
But virtue to pursue and knowledge high.''
(11. 110 – 117.)

I do not think this translation perfect by any means, however. We

have to make allowances for the use of the word 'proof' here, and the conscious literary usage of 'Phoebus'. But the vagueness of 'Call to mind from whence ye sprang' is well suited to that difficult appeal to 'semenza' in the Italian. We might have further difficulty with the encouragement to 'pursue virtue and knowledge high,' both of which in this context smack of early Victorianism to some degree. Nevertheless we may feel that Cary has pitched Ulysses' sense of his own importance about right:

> 'With these few words I sharpen'd for the voyage
> The mind of my associates, that I then
> Could scarcely have witheld them...' (11. 118 – 120.)

There is a touch of realism in the way he refers to their voyage as a 'witless flight', and the depiction of the sinking of the ship is on the whole less awkward than Chipman's or Sayers' versions, and much less banal that Sinclair's:

> '.....Joy seized us straight;
> But soon to mourning changed. From the new land
> A whirlwind sprung, and at her foremost side
> Did strike the vessel. Thrice it whirl'd her round
> With all the waves; the fourth time lifted up
> The poop, and sank the prow: so fate decreed:
> And over us the booming billow closed.' (11. 129 – 135.)

Binyon opts for *terza rima,* but Chipman opines that this translation 'misses the music' of the original. (Translator's Note, p. vii.) Binyon justifies his choice by in turn remarking of Cary's translation that

'With all its merits it has the great disadvantage of giving a quite false impression of the movement of Dante's verse by using a blank verse on the Miltonic model.' Certainly the 'booming billow' is evidence of a sense of a height of language rather different from the overwhelming simplicity of the original Italian. In episodes other than the one we are looking at Cary's version can seem on the heavy side, and he sometimes relies on inversions of sentence structure that too much remind us of Milton. It is presumably to try for a different and lighter touch that Binyon chooses to use *terza rima.* He tells us that in his own attempt he has 'sought to evoke in some measure a resemblance to the modulations of Dante's rhythm. The translation is as close as is compatible with the difficulties caused not only by the rhymes, but by the fact that the English words are almost invariably shorter than the Italian.' (Preface published in *The Augustan Books of English Poetry,* 2nd. series, No. 30, ? 1929.) Virgil's request to the flame, however, seems to me to lack compulsion:

> 'If merit, much or little, had my name,
> When the great verse I made beneath the sun,
> Move not, but let the one of you who can
> Tell where he went to perish, being undone.'
> (op. cit., p. 13, 11. 2 – 5.)

Technically, like the other translations we have seen, Binyon renders the Italian faithfully into English. But what Dante means by 'quando nel mondo gli alti versi scrisse' (1. 82) is simply 'when I (Virgil) was back on the earth and composed my famous verses.' Binyon's decora-

tion of the original in the attempt to turn it into English poetry becomes somewhat gratuitous, and there may be even a touch of Miltonic phraseology in 'being undone'. However, the description of the trembling flame strikes a more credible note:

> The greater horn of the ancient flame began
> To shudder and make a murmur, like a fire
> When the wind worries it with gusty fan,
> Then tossed upon a flickering crest yet higher,
> As it had been a tongue that spoke, it cast
> A voice forth from the strength of its desire... (11. 6 – 11.)

Apart from the 'literary' expression 'gusty fan' we have a vocabulary more suited to the subject, and a movement of *terza rima* that flows much more like Cary's blank verse than Chipman's lines. Yet again we find interpolations. Binyon, perhaps to meet the requirements of the metre, has fitted in the expression 'from the strength of its desire' which has no original in the Italian. It strikes me as being quite unsuitable because the figure of Ulysses as I tend to read him has no particular wish to unburden himself of his story, unlike a number of the shades whom Dante-the-pilgrim meets. He is merely answering the polite request put to him by Virgil.

Binyon's Ulysses does, however, strike something of the right pitch in the following lines:

> 'Not sweet son, nor old honoured father, nor
> The long-due love which was to have made glad
> Penelope for all the pain she bore,

Could conquer the inward hunger that I had
To master earth's experience, and to attain
Knowledge of man's mind, both the good and bad.'
(11. 15 – 20.)

Here we have examples of quite appropriate expansion in 'for all the pain she bore,' and a workable modern equivalent in 'the inward hunger that I had / To master earth's experience,' though the word 'master' here is somewhat too academic. But this does not last; a rather clumsy artificiality predominates in the ensuing descriptions. Ulysses and his men are described as 'old and stiff of thew,' an expression very reminiscent of the Miltonic rhetoric Binyon disdains in his Preface. Once again we have, as we have had in so many of the versions looked at so far, a posing literary dignity:

' 'Brothers,' I said, 'Who manfully, despite
Ten thousand perils, have attained the West,
In the brief vigil that remains of light
To feel in, stoop not to renounce the quest
Of what may in the sun's path be essayed,
The world that never man-kind hath possessed.
Think on the seed ye spring from! Ye were made
Not to live life of brute beasts of the field
But follow virtue and knowledge unafraid.'
With such few words their spirit so I steel'd,
That I thereafter scarce could have contained
My comrades from the voyage, had I willed.'
(p. 13, l. 33 – p. 14, l. 7.)

The nature of the appeal which he makes and the kind of response he secures from his companions have been considerably distorted, partly by the use of elevated language, such as 'stoop not to renounce the quest,' or 'Think on the seed ye spring from,' and partly by additions quite unimplied in the original, for example, 'follow virtue and knowledge *unafraid.*' The Ulysses here has a sense of his own importance quite alien to Dante's Ulysses and a somewhat supercilious view of his companions expressed in the way he 'steel'd' their spirits with 'such few words.' The sinking of the ship suffers in much the same way. Where intrusions might have rendered the concision of the Italian more credible in English we have only the same kind of clumsy literary language such as we have come across elsewhere: the storm 'heaved the poop up, the prow drowned.'

I would like to suggest, however, that if a translator took a sufficiently bold approach to his original by omitting sections which changed the substance of it when they were faithfully rendered, or by expanding sections that were important but which lost credibility from their over-conciseness, he might stand more chance of recreating in his own language the 'matter' before him. Binyon's is the only translation we have looked at so far that has attempted to tamper with the original Italian, though in ways which I think were not motivated by the same principles that I have just suggested.

Finally I would like to look at a freer attempt. This version in fact takes so many liberties with the original that it might be difficult to call it a translation at all. We are offered instead an expanded oration going quite deeply into the past experiences of the Ulysses and

accounting for his decision to set sail once again. It ends with the speech to his comrades, and we have nothing of the voyage or its fate. Since it has taken so many liberties with the original we might expect to find it a very successful recreation, and in one sense it is.

Sinclair writes that Dante's original 'inspired what are perhaps Tennyson's finest lines' (op. cit., p. 330) and J. H. Buckley says that Tennyson's *Ulysses* 'is clearly the most vigorously assertive of the poems occasioned by Hallam's death.' (*Tennyson, The Growth of a Poet*, Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 60.) Hallam's death may have caused Tennyson to think deeply about mortality, adding a dimension of personal involvement to the theme of the Ulysses poem, but the poem itself concentrates on presenting us a hero, the kind of man whom his companions could not think of refusing to accompany on this last voyage. This poem, in blank verse, was probably written in 1833, and contemporary readers, too, apparently felt that it represented a peak in Tennyson's work. John Sterling was impressed with it, and even Thackeray's Colonel Newcome had to admit that it was a fine poem, though he could not, apparently, quite understand the 'prodigious laudations' it received. (*The Life and Times of Tennyson*, Thomas R. Lounsbury, Russell & Russell, NY, 1962, p. 498.)

Perhaps the first thing we notice about this Ulysses, however, is that he takes a stance, adopts a pose. He seems rather disconcerted that he should have to linger at home, handing out his legal decisions to a rather undeserving people:

'It little profits that an idle king...

.....I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.'
(11. 1 – 5.)

The self-assumed dignity seems dangerously close to petulance to a modern reader. Indeed, this Ulysses's pride separates him from his people, and we are treated to a curious self-analysis in which he lays bare his attitude to life, though there is no space to quote it fully here. The lines:

'I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees:' (11. 6 – 7)

might initially sound impressive, but the rhythm only substantiates a somewhat sedentary attitude:

'.....all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone.....' (11. 7 – 9.)

We might become a little suspicious about this man who tells us so glibly that he has 'suffer'd greatly.' Perhaps we also begin to notice the persistent repetition of 'I', substantiating a concern for reputation and status:

'.....I am become *a name*;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,

Myself not least, but *honour'd of them all.*'
(11. 11 – 15, my italics.)

We realise that Dante's Ulysses has had no need to try and impress us. He has not recounted any of his exploits in order to establish his position. His assumption that people will listen if he talks is not so much the result of arrogance as of a natural dignity and importance. The more Tennyson's figure finds it necessary to state and assert his prestige, the more we may wonder why he must do so. Further, we might ask why the Victorians responded to such a presentation, which strikes me as being not far short of bombastic.

It would be wrong of me not to do credit to the lines in this poem which do have a mystery and a beauty, but they are, nevertheless, coloured with the conspicuous narcissism of the central figure:

'Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.' (11. 19 – 21.)

This Ulysses leaves his son Telemachus to bring up his 'savage race' along the paths of 'the useful and the good' (essential Victorian values) while he himself must 'follow knowledge like a sinking star.' The gulf between the essential purpose behind his wish to travel and that of Dante's Ulysses can best be seen in the section of the poem that corresponds to the speech to the faithful companions. Tennyson's Ulysses seems very anxious that whatever he does will not be lost on mankind. His concern with his reputation is transparent in the lines:

'Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some *work of noble note,* may yet be done,

Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.'
(11. 51 – 53, my italics.)

There is a beauty, again, in the lines that follow,

'The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices...' (11. 54 – 56)

though even here we must notice the essential romanticism of the view. But this picture is soon shattered by the literary rhetoric of the 'hero' who might be suspected of looking down on the very companions whose assistance he requires, and of never having had calloused hands himself:

'.....Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and *sitting well in order smite*
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.'
(11. 56 – 61, my italics.)

Tennyson loses a great deal of the mystery by making Ulysses state things so specifically. There is a self-consciousness and an assumption that his stance is couragious and impressive which detract significantly from the potential stature of the figure. The final exhortation is much in the same vein:

'.....and tho'

> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.' (11. 65 – end.)

We might usefully recall Ransom's objections to the code of values he ascribes to Dante's Ulysses, and indeed more or less to Dante himself, and realise that he would have been on safer grounds had he been referring in that opening speech not to the original, or even the Temple Classics version of it, but to Tennyson's recreation.

I stated a few lines above that I thought Tennyson's translation, if I could loosely apply that term to his poem, was 'successful'. I have shown that it was not 'successful' in terms of being an accurate translation of the original, but it is a successful version if by successful one means that he has managed to make an appeal to his own time that has an equivalent cultural weight to the appeal Dante's figure may have had to his readers. Tennyson has substituted language that carries with it heavy social and cultural implications of standards and values of his time ('To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield') and in this way he has made a Ulysses who is intelligible to his audience. But, in fact, I doubt if that is what a translator should do. He ought to steer the difficult channel between making a figure that is ridiculous, as, by and large, the Ulysses figures of the other translations we have looked at are, and making a figure that is *known and understood already*. Tennyson's Ulysses is almost a good Victorian gentleman, with all the assumptions

of his place in society and the values which he represents firmly embedded. Yet, what we have lost, then, is the possibility of seeing the figure of a man who in this case happens to be a 'hero' but who represents dimensions of the 'heroic' not suspected by the Victorians. Some essential elements have simply been discarded, much, I feel, to the loss of the Victorian awareness: for example, Ulysses' lack of a sense of self-importance, the relaxed, casual, almost ironical way he refers both to himself and his colleagues, and his total unconcern as to whether he will be properly reported or not. We might face a similar problem, for example, if we found in Japanese a Ulysses who talked in the language of a mid-Edo period *samurai*, language which has already a rich and complex code of value assumptions which may or may not be anything like the value assumptions that are Dante's concern. We can see, therefore, that the translator's task is the impossible one of trying as far as he can to avoid the ready-made implications of his own language in attempting to portray figures or ideas that may in cases go beyond or be rather different from those of his own culture. If he fails to do this he is merely *corroborating values*, as Tennyson is, by reference to figures from another day and age, or another set of values, shorn of their own implications.

It might seem silly in the face of the many versions of this particular episode from Dante's *Inferno* in English to say that we do not yet have, to my knowledge at least, a good translation. But I have to say that if I am asked to recommend one that will give us a view of Ulysses much like the view of him expressed in the original, that will transmit the 'substance' of Dante's version, *to say nothing of the poetry*, I am at a loss.